



GENESIS, CHAPTER 4

Cain and Abel.

- 1 The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, saying, "I have produced a male child with the help of the LORD."^{*}
- 2 Next she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel became a herder of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the ground.^{*}
- 3 In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the ground,
- 4 while Abel, for his part, brought the fatty portion^{*} of the firstlings of his flock.^a The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,
- 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and dejected.
- 6 Then the LORD said to Cain: Why are you angry? Why are you dejected?
- 7 If you act rightly, you will be accepted;^{*} but if not, sin lies in wait at the door: its urge is for you, yet you can rule over it.^b
- 8 Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out in the field."^{*} When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.^c
- 9 Then the LORD asked Cain, Where is your brother Abel? He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"
- 10 God then said: What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!
- 11 Now you are banned from the ground^{*} that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.^d
- 12 If you till the ground, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a constant wanderer on the earth.
- 13 Cain said to the LORD: "My punishment is too great to bear.
- 14 Look, you have now banished me from the ground. I must avoid you and be a constant wanderer on the earth. Anyone may kill me at sight."
- 15 Not so! the LORD said to him. If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged seven^{*}

times. So the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one would kill him at sight.

- 16 Cain then left the LORD's presence and settled in the land of Nod, ^{*} east of Eden.

Descendants of Cain and Seth.

- 17 ^{*} Cain had intercourse with his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. Cain also became the founder of a city, which he named after his son Enoch.

- 18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad became the father of Mehujael; Mehujael became the father of Methusael, and Methusael became the father of Lamech.

- 19 Lamech took two wives; the name of the first was Adah, and the name of the second Zillah.

- 20 Adah gave birth to Jabal, who became the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and keep livestock.

- 21 His brother's name was Jubal, who became the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the reed pipe.

- 22 Zillah, on her part, gave birth to Tubalcain, the ancestor of all who forge instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubalcain was Naamah.

- 23 ^{*} Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
wives of Lamech, listen to my utterance:
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for bruising me.

- 24 If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times.”

- 25 ^{*} Adam again had intercourse with his wife, and she gave birth to a son whom she called Seth. “God has granted me another offspring in place of Abel,” she said, “because Cain killed him.”

- 26 To Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh.

At that time people began to invoke the LORD by name. ^e

^{*} [4:1] The Hebrew name *qayin* (“Cain”) and the term *qaniti* (“I have produced”) present a wordplay that refers to metalworking; such wordplays are frequent in Genesis.

^{*} [4:2] Some suggest the story reflects traditional strife between the farmer (Cain) and the nomad (Abel), with preference for the latter reflecting the alleged nomadic ideal of the Bible. But there is no disparagement of farming here, for Adam was created to till the soil. The story is about two brothers (the word “brother” occurs seven times) and God's unexplained preference for one, which provokes the first murder. The motif of the preferred younger brother will occur time and again in the Bible, e.g., Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David ([1 Sm 16:1–13](#)).

* [\[4:4\]](#) Fatty portion: it was standard practice to offer the fat portions of animals. Others render, less satisfactorily, “the choicest of the firstlings.” The point is not that Abel gave a more valuable gift than Cain, but that God, for reasons not given in the text, accepts the offering of Abel and rejects that of Cain.

* [\[4:7\]](#) You will be accepted: the text is extraordinarily condensed and unclear. “You will be accepted” is a paraphrase of one Hebrew word, “lifting.” God gives a friendly warning to Cain that his right conduct will bring “lifting,” which could refer to acceptance (*lifting*) of his future offerings or of himself (as in the Hebrew idiom “*lifting* of the face”) or *lifting* up of his head in honor (cf. note on [40:13](#)), whereas wicked conduct will make him vulnerable to sin, which is personified as a force ready to attack. In any case, Cain has the ability to do the right thing. Lies in wait: sin is personified as a power that “lies in wait” (Heb. *robes*) at a place. In Mesopotamian religion, a related word (*rabisu*) refers to a malevolent god who attacks human beings in particular places like roofs or canals.

* [\[4:8\]](#) Let us go out in the field: to avoid detection. The verse presumes a sizeable population which Genesis does not otherwise explain.

* [\[4:11\]](#) Banned from the ground: lit., “cursed.” The verse refers back to [3:17](#) where the ground was cursed so that it yields its produce only with great effort. Cain has polluted the soil with his brother’s blood and it will no longer yield any of its produce to him.

* [\[4:15\]](#) A mark: probably a tattoo to mark Cain as protected by God. The use of tattooing for tribal marks has always been common among the Bedouin of the Near Eastern deserts.

* [\[4:16\]](#) The land of Nod: a symbolic name (derived from the verb *nûd*, to wander) rather than a definite geographic region.

* [\[4:17–24\]](#) Cain is the first in a seven-member linear genealogy ending in three individuals who initiate action (Jabal, Jubal, and Tubalcain). Other Genesis genealogies also end in three individuals initiating action ([5:32](#) and [11:26](#)). The purpose of this genealogy is to explain the origin of culture and crafts among human beings. The names in this genealogy are the same (some with different spellings) as those in the ten-member genealogy (ending with Noah), which has a slightly different function. See note on [5:1–32](#).

* [\[4:23–24\]](#) Lamech’s boast shows that the violence of Cain continues with his son and has actually increased. The question is posed to the reader: how will God’s creation be renewed?

* [\[4:25–26\]](#) The third and climactic birth story in the chapter, showing that this birth, unlike the other two, will have good results. The name Seth (from the Hebrew verb *shat*, “to place, replace”) shows that God has replaced Abel with a worthy successor. From this favored line Enosh (“human being/humankind”), a synonym of Adam, authentic religion began with the worship of Yhwh; this divine name is rendered as “the LORD” in this translation. The Yahwist source employs the name Yhwh long before the time of Moses. Another ancient source, the Elohist (from its use of the term *Elohim*, “God,” instead of *Yhwh*, “LORD,” for the pre-Mosaic period), makes Moses the first to use Yhwh as the proper name of Israel’s God, previously known by other names as well; cf. [Ex 3:13–15](#).

a. [\[4:4\]](#) [Ex 34:19](#); [Heb 11:4](#).

b. [\[4:7\]](#) [Sir 7:1](#); [Jude 11](#).

c. [\[4:8\]](#) [Wis 10:3](#); [Mt 23:35](#); [Lk 11:51](#); [1 Jn 3:12](#); [Jude 11](#).

- d. [\[4:11\]](#) [Dt 27:24](#).
- e. [\[4:26\]](#) [1 Chr 1:1](#); [Lk 3:38](#).

Anti-Trafficking Program	Communications	General Counsel	Migration and Refugee Services
Canonical Affairs and Church Governance	Cultural Diversity in the Church	General Secretariat	Migration Policy
Catholic Campaign for Human Development	Customer and Client Relations	Government Relations	National Collections
Catholic Education	Divine Worship	Human Resources	National Religious Retirement Office
Catholic News Service	Doctrine	International Justice and Peace	New American Bible
Child and Youth Protection	Domestic Social Development	Justice, Peace & Human Development	Pro-life Activities
Children and Migration	Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs	Laity, Marriage, Family Life & Youth	Resettlement Services
Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations	Evangelization and Catechesis	Media Relations	World Youth Day